

In the mood for a good movie?**Will LDS quarry project aid climbers?***Granite retrieval work may pave the way for trails and a restroom*

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Here's irony for you: The LDS Church's proposal to retrieve granite from a quarry in Little Cottonwood Canyon may actually benefit rock climbers who frequent the area.

Climbers have been working for years to get more trails as well as a permanent restroom on the site. The U.S. Forest Service has signed off on the idea, but talks with the church, which owns the property, have been bogged down.

Now, the church wants to build two roads and a staging area to split and retrieve granite boulders to create facing for its new assembly hall north of Temple Square. Upon completion, the roads might very well be turned into trails, and with the area disrupted already, putting in a restroom would be relatively easy to do.

"(The granite retrieval project) has brought it up to the front, so I guess that's a positive," said Ted Wilson, a former Salt Lake mayor and a climber.

The project has been a controversial one. Wednesday the County Commission hears an appeal of a March 24 Planning Commission decision to grant the church a conditional-use permit to retrieve the granite. Appellant David Carrier says the operation would drive away wildlife, destabilize and scar the mountain and pollute the area.

"The Planning Commission ought to put concern for the community above private property rights in that area," he said.

The County Commission may decide to uphold the Planning Commission's decision, overturn it, modify it or delay the decision. Commissioners aren't saying exactly what they'll do but appear likely to side with the church.

"If they were really ripping the area up that would be one thing, but they're not," said Sam Klemm, Commissioner Mary Callaghan's administrative assistant. "They have a good case."

Concerns about the environment in the quarry area are not new. Climbers and environmentalists have been worried for some time about erosion and fecal matter in the heavily used region.



Dave Carrier and Mark Shurtleff look over the quarry from where the LDS Church plans to remove granite for its new assembly hall.

Johanna Workman, Deseret News

Allen Sanderson, regional representative of Access Fund, a national climbers advocacy organization, said church officials have been working hard to accommodate climbers with their granite retrieval project. The church has already allowed climbers to use the private property for more than 40 years, and now it has invited climbers to mark boulders they like to use, promising to leave those alone. The quarry roads will be located below most climbing activity.

"The LDS Church has been a great friend to the climbing community by allowing us relatively unrestricted access to (its) property in pursuit of our recreational endeavors," Sanderson wrote in a letter to the Deseret News.

Climbers have been on the fence regarding the church's proposal, expressing neither strong support for nor strong opposition to it.

The church wants to install one 560-foot-long road and another road 300 feet long in the middle of a peaceful area full of beautiful, leafy scrub oak interspersed with boulders and vegetation to get machinery to the boulder field where it wants to work. The church has been working with the county on a revegetation and rehabilitation plan, though that might be changed should it opt for the climbers' trail/restroom proposal.

The church has modified various parts of the plan — water, noise and air pollution mitigation, grading, reclamation, drainage — in consultation with county planning officials since the Planning Commission decision. County director of Development Services J.D. Johnson said the plan has been changed at least six times in an attempt to comply with the 16 conditions the commission placed on granting the conditional-use permit.

The quarry is the same one used to mine granite for the Salt Lake LDS Temple, though the particular location within the quarry now under consideration was not used.

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